

Community resources

[Follow us on Twitter](#) [Check our Reddit](#) [Twitter this](#) [Digg this page](#) [Contact us on IRC](#)

courage is contagious

Viewing cable 08BEIJING1454, HU JINTAO IN CHARGE OF TIBET POLICY; LEADERSHIP

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08BEIJING1454**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BEIJING1454	2008-04-16 10:34	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beijing

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.spiegel.de>

VZCZCXRO9478
OO RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHBJ #1454/01 1071034
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 161034Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6606
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIJING 001454

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2033
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KOLY](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: HU JINTAO IN CHARGE OF TIBET POLICY; LEADERSHIP
UNIFIED, BUOYED AND CONSTRAINED BY NATIONALIST SENTIMENT

REF: A. OSC cpp20080407530001
[1](#)B. OSC cpp20080408507001
[1](#)C. OSC fea20080407617427

Classified By: Ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) President Hu Jintao remains firmly in charge of China's policy on Tibet, with the leadership unified over Beijing's current hard-line stance and buoyed by rising PRC nationalist sentiment, xxxxx.

Given Hu's background and experience in Tibet, as well as the "extremely sensitive" nature of the issue, no one would "dare" challenge Hu or the Party line, contacts say. While there may be differences in how various leaders publicly articulate China's Tibet policy, there are no substantive differences among the top leadership. Similarly, Embassy sources do not believe that two recent articles in Party-controlled southern newspapers signaled leadership debate or a review of policy, instead arguing the pieces perhaps reflect an adjustment in the Party's media strategy. The Party has been buoyed by rising nationalist sentiment, fueled in part by anger at the West over "biased" media reporting on Tibet and Olympic-related protests, but this nationalistic fervor also constrains future policy choices. Regardless, any modification of Tibet policy is unlikely in the short term, at least until after the Olympics, contacts say. End Summary.

Hu Jintao Firmly in Charge, Leadership Unified

¶2. (C) President Hu Jintao is firmly in charge of the PRC's Tibet policy, with the leadership unified over Beijing's current hard-line stance, several Embassy contacts told PolOffs over the past week. Sources argued that given Hu Jintao's own expertise and experience regarding Tibet (Hu was provincial party secretary in Tibet in the late 1980s), as well as the "extreme" importance and sensitivity of the Tibet issue, it would be virtually "impossible" for any leader to challenge Hu on Tibet. An issue as sensitive as Tibet policy would be controlled by a small group of top leaders, limited primarily to the nine-member Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), meaning it is difficult to know precisely the content of leadership discussions on Tibet, longtime Embassy contact xxxxx.

Nevertheless, "it is still quite clear," xxxxx argued, that Hu Jintao is "completely" in charge of the Tibet issue, and no other leader would "dare" confront Hu or the Party line over such a critical issue. Doing so would be "political suicide" and would make any leader vulnerable to charges of being "soft," or even being a "traitor," risking eventual removal, a la the ouster of former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang in 1987, xxxxx averred.

¶3. (C) There is "absolutely no division" within the leadership on Tibet, xxxxx. For the Chinese leadership, Tibet is even more sensitive than Taiwan. Among the nine members of the PBSC who are controlling China's Tibet policy, no one has the stature or experience to challenge Hu, xxxxx said, noting that four are brand new members of the PBSC, and no one on the PBSC other than Hu has direct experience in Tibet. It was Hu Jintao, as then-Party Secretary in Tibet, who oversaw the "quick and effective

Sipdis suppression" of protests there in 1987 and 1989, which earned him "great praise" from then-paramount leader Deng Xiaoping and which was an important factor in his elevation to the PBSC in 1992, xxxxx recalled. Thus, Hu has "great confidence" when it comes to Tibet, putting him in a virtually unassailable position. There may be room within the leadership for expressing differences with Hu on issues such as Taiwan, economic development or political reform, but not on Tibet, xxxxx asserted.

Different Views Exist in Party, but No Disagreement at Top

¶4. (C) A range of contacts have acknowledged that there are differences of opinion within the Party and among elites regarding Tibet, though none believed this reflected any disagreement among the top leadership. For example, xxxxx acknowledged the presence of more "moderate" voices on Tibet within the Party, but he nevertheless stressed that it is Hu Jintao who is "completely" in charge of China's Tibet policy. Moreover, it

Beijing 00001454 002 of 004

is clear that those such as Hu favoring a "hard line" are calling the shots. (Note: xxxxx view that Tibet policy is more sensitive for China's leadership than even Taiwan, noting that despite its rhetoric, Beijing has de facto accepted the involvement of the United States in Taiwan, but China can never accept the "interference" of

foreign powers in Tibet.)xxxxx, confessed that he "personally" favors a more "measured" approach to Tibet, to include dialogue with the Dalai Lama, given that "only the Dalai Lama" can unify the majority of the Tibetan community both within China and abroad.

15. (C) Separately, xxxxx "many elites" are advocating a reassessment of policy toward the Dalai Lama, questioning the wisdom of demonizing and refusing to negotiate with him. According to xxxxx however, apart from a "minority" of "elites" and "intellectuals," the majority of the Party rank-and-file, as well as "98 percent" of the public, support the current policy. Any serious disagreement over Tibet among the Party leadership is "simply unimaginable," xxxxx stated, a view separately shared xxxxx.

Public Statements: Difference in Nuance, not Substance

16. (C) While there may be differences in how various leaders have publicly articulated China's Tibet policy, there are no substantive differences among the top leadership, contacts asserted. For example, xxxxx said he does not believe there is disagreement between President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao over Tibet, as some have speculated based on Wen's purportedly more "moderate" comments to UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his statement to the media in Laos on March 30 regarding the Dalai Lama. xxxxx asserted that, on Tibet, Hu and Wen are like a "restaurant sugar packet," black on one side and white on the other, but still part of the same whole. In other words, Hu and Wen merely emphasize different aspects of the same policy. xxxxx said xxxxx "sensed" Wen may be "slightly more moderate" on Tibet than some other leaders, but he thought that represents Wen's style and does not imply a disagreement over official policy. xxxxx shared this view, attributing the Prime Minister's March 30 remarks to "Wen simply being Wen" and appearing more "moderate and reasonable" on almost every issue, even though his comments represented no serious departure from the official line.

Southern Media Pieces Reflect No Division over Policy

17. (C) xxxxx did not think that two recent articles in Party-controlled southern newspapers signaled leadership debate or divisions, instead offering that the articles perhaps reflected an adjustment in the Party's media strategy. Both articles appeared on April 3 in Guangdong Provincial Party papers that have a reputation for pushing the limits of Central Propaganda Department (CPD) guidelines. The first, which appeared in a blog run by Southern Metropolis (Nanfang Dushibao), was critical of the Party's restrictions on reporting in Tibet, arguing that allowing foreign reporters to cover the story directly would provide a more accurate picture of events. The second, published in Southern Weekend (Nanfang Zhoumou), argued that most Tibetans are not separatists and do not support or participate in the unrest or advocate violence, and that such distinctions should be made when responding to the issue. The article also called for talks with the Dalai Lama. (See refs A-C.)

18. (C) xxxxx with whom PolOffs met in the last week had not read or heard of either article, which PolOffs interpreted as a sign that the pieces are not terribly significant. xxxxx, explicitly made this point, arguing that the article in the Southern Metropolis did not represent anything other than the "pro-Western slant" of the Southern Daily Media Group and "liberal southern journalists." The piece would only be significant if more "authoritative" media outlets had picked it up. xxxxx, thought it represented a desire among some elites for a review of Tibet policy but also noted that the piece was criticized by many internally in the Party. xxxxx, saying that the articles merely reflected the "traditionally liberal" stances of both newspapers, which are noted for "pushing the envelope" ("da cabianqiu," literally "playing edge ball").

Beijing 00001454 003 of 004

It is too early to tell whether these pieces have crossed a red line, xxxxx said, noting that both papers have often gotten into trouble with propaganda officials in the past.

¶9. (C) Surprisingly, even the xxxxx had not read either article that appeared in his group's newspapers. In response to PolOff's summary of the pieces, he strongly doubted they carried any political significance. Perhaps, he said, they represent an adjustment in the Party's media strategy. The Southern Weekend editor-in-chief must have had prior approval from Party authorities to publish the piece, xxxxx surmised, otherwise the editor would have been "dismissed immediately" for publishing such a sensitive article on his own. With Hu Jintao himself in charge of the media response to Tibet, xxxxx asked rhetorically, what newspaper editor would dare challenge the official media line, even implicitly? Therefore, the article's import, xxxxx claimed, is that it demonstrates the "slight loosening" of Party propaganda guidance on Tibet coverage beginning in late March, which purportedly allows for the "more nuanced" reporting advocated in the Southern Weekend article itself.

¶10. (C) Similarly, xxxxx was not aware of the articles. After listening to PolOff's explanation of them, however, xxxxx commented that the pieces likely represent the fact that there is "room for diversity" under the Propaganda Department's latest guidance. (Note: Despite this supposed "room" for more nuanced reporting on Tibet, xxxxx said Tibet is "far too sensitive" and his magazine has therefore decided "not to touch" the story for now. xxxxx, reportedly have been "ordered" to produce cover stories on Tibet under "very strict" guidelines from the Propaganda Department.)

Party Buoyed by Nationalist Sentiment...

¶11. (C) Almost all of xxxxx the Party has been buoyed by rising nationalist sentiment, fueled in part by anger at the West over "biased" media reporting on Tibet and Olympic-related protests. xxxxx all emphasized to PolOff that Chinese "anger" over the West's "bias" on Tibet is real, widespread and will have long-term effects. xxxxx them seemed themselves to be angry over Western media reporting, refusing to recognize the irony that for most Chinese, their only access to this "biased Western reporting" is through the official PRC press agency Xinhua's characterization of it. xxxxx emphasized that virtually "everyone" he knows is angry and believes that Western reporting, together with calls for boycotting the Olympic opening ceremony, implies support for Tibetan independence and makes the public feel that the West is trying to "keep China down." xxxxx, meanwhile, said nationalism is definitely surging, but he thought this sentiment is largely concentrated in the 25-35-year-old age group among both Hans and Tibetans.

¶12. (C) Whatever the causes of the surge in nationalism, the result has been a dramatic increase in support for the Party's policy on Tibet, contacts say. xxxxx said this outcome is partly a "natural" reaction to the fact that Chinese have in recent years become more nationalistic as a result of growing pride over China's rapid development, with the Tibet furor merely providing the most recent "spark" to inflame passions. xxxx separately acknowledged, however, that the Party's propaganda line has also purposefully stoked nationalistic feelings in order to rally the public in support of the Center's Tibet policy, and so far, it has been very successful in doing so. The recent Tibet crisis has "completely unified" the people behind the Party and Government, something that had been "unthinkable" throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s, xxxxx asserted.

...But Also Constrained by Popular Passions

¶13. (C) Although support for the Party over Tibet is currently quite high, popular passions also serve to constrain the leadership's options, xxxxx warned. Nationalism remains one "pillar" of Party rule, but central leaders do not want to let these feelings "spin out of control," xxxxx said. Perhaps reflecting these concerns, the Propaganda Department earlier this month reportedly directed that attacks on the Western press in China's official media be curtailed, according xxxxx

xxxxx. That has not, however, stopped Chinese bloggers from continuing their attacks via the Internet, xxxxx observed. xxxxx also expressed concern about the long-term implications of the surge in nationalism, noting that "nothing is ever completely good." At any rate, there is "virtually no way" the Center could initiate a change in policy toward Tibet and the Dalai Lama, at least in the short term, given the popular anger over such issues, xxxxx said.

Policy Change Unlikely in the Short Term

¶14. (C) Major policy adjustment on Tibet is highly unlikely for the foreseeable future for a host of reasons other than popular sentiment, at least until after the Olympics, contacts say. Given Hu's own legacy in Tibet, where he cracked down on similar demonstrations in 1987 and 1989, Hu Jintao will likely be loath to adopt a "softer" line, lest his own policies and past actions come under criticism, xxxxx argued. Moreover, it will be almost "impossible" for Chinese leaders to reorient policy if they look like they are doing so under international pressure, xxxxx assessed. Moreover, xxxxx observed, domestic stability remains the leadership's top priority above all else, meaning there will "almost surely" be no relaxation of the current hard line on Tibet or in places like Xinjiang. xxxxx said he sensed Chinese leaders worry they could lose control of Tibet if they do not maintain tight control there, which would have both domestic consequences and could invite "unwanted interference" from India.

¶15. (C) While staging a successful Olympics is also a priority, xxxxx said he senses the leadership has assessed that at a minimum, athletes will show up to the Games. As a result, the Center is starting to adjust public expectations about the Games by saying that, even if there is a "boycott" of the opening ceremony, that is not important, given that it is the IOC and respective National Olympic Committees, not the Chinese Government, that decide whether to invite national leaders. (Note: xxxxx disagreed, saying that, in his view, the success of the Games for Chinese leaders hinges on whether President Bush attends the opening ceremonies.) xxxxx said that Hu Jintao's comments on April 12 to Australian PM Rudd on the margins of the Bo'ao Forum, which were reported via Xinhua and reflected China's hard-line stance on Tibet to date, signaled that domestically there is "no room for debate" on the Tibet issue. Only after Tibetan areas have "settled down" and the Olympics have concluded, will there be any chance for a possible review of Tibet policy, he asserted. Randt